

TESTIMONY: SB 136

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I am grateful to the Senate Committee on Health Policy for providing an opportunity for the public to comment on SB 136. My frame of reference for commenting on this legislation is both religious and personal. Currently, I serve as the Director of the Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network, a statewide network of Unitarian Universalist activists from 27 UU congregations. One of the moral principles of the Unitarian Universalist denomination is that all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Our Unitarian Universalist denomination voted last summer to make Reproductive Justice our Study/Action Issue for the next three years. Reproductive Justice means that all people should have access to essential health care they need to maintain their well being. Unitarian Universalists and people from other religious faiths also believe that Reproductive Justice means that families should have the right to choose whether to have children or to limit their family size.

From a personal point of view, I want to be able to walk down the aisle with my beautiful 27 year old daughter. We expect she and her boyfriend will, in the not too distant future, be getting married. My daughter is a loving and nurturing person who wants to raise a family. However, if she were to become pregnant before or after marriage and this pregnancy turned into a life threatening health care crisis, I want my daughter and other Michigan woman to have the right to choose the health care that they need to preserve their life.

In the name of "religious liberty", SB 136 would allow employers, facilities and health insurance companies to refuse to provide coverage for any essential health care services they object to on religious beliefs or moral convictions. This legislation would provide an employer or insurance company an excuse, cloaked in morality, to improve their bottom line by cutting health care benefits.

In the guise of religious freedom, this bill legalizes discrimination and against women and gay people. In the name of religion, this bill would allow one person to impose their moral beliefs on others. Denial of medical services will have consequences. Under the bill, which makes no exceptions for the life of the woman, a woman who requires -- but is denied -- a therapeutic abortion could lose her life because of another persons' moral convictions. If a morally confused health care provider believes that his gay patient was an "abomination to God", then SB 136 would allow that misguided health provider to deny a person with AIDS/HIV from receiving life saving medications without fear of repercussions. A health care professional's primary concern should be a patient's welfare regardless of their religious objections.

For these reasons, my faith-based organization strongly opposes passage of SB 136.